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AN ADDRESS

GIVEN BY

MRS. HERBERT COHEN,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

SOCIETY FOR THE

DISTRIBUTION OF JEWISH LITERATURE

HELD ON DECEMBER 12TH, 1917,

AT 2 ORME COURT, W.

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THE Society for the Distribution of Jewish Literature has for its aims and objects the materialisation of certain great Jewish ideals, the foundations of which I believe to be, if not always apparent; at least always latent in the hearts of all the Israelites.

The basic inspiration of Judaism is the Unity of God, the Unity of God held so firmly within us, that it becomes the great driving force of the mind, body and actions of every soul born into the Jewish faith, so that we can affirm with inward convictions that which we repeat often times mechanically : "All my bones shall say : Lord who is like unto Thee."

Our great literature embraces this spiritual teaching, but we alas! as a race have fallen into ways of materialism. We have lost that revealed insight, which in olden times produced not only our great inspired teachers, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah and countless others, but also a people who had the inner perception needed to understand and believe, that life itself must be lived with the conviction of God within us. This brings us to loving God and loving man, and thus all can enter into Unity.

It is said "that where there is no vision the people

perish," and we Jews will surely perish unless more light is thrown on the teachings of our Faith.

The Society for the Distribution of Jewish Literature does not wish to teach anything new; it does not desire to spread ideas, which to some might appear heterodox; it only wants to produce a revival, a renewal and a better understanding of the blessedness and security of a Faith of a revealed religion, which has ever stood for all that is divinely noble and great.

These days of material uncertainty necessarily make all the peoples of the world, be they Jew, Gentile, or of any other creed, feel that all the earthly things on which hitherto they have set great store are as nought, and that everything is crumbling beneath them, and they are forcibly being brought face to face with a great disturbing question, namely, what has the building up of this present day civilization done for us, that after all these years we have no better weapon than that of the force of Might? And must we not stand ashamed, nay deeply humiliated, when we are obliged to acknowledge that, notwithstanding all our so-called religious teachings, we have not yet mastered, nor even *understood*, the one Truth underlying all religions, namely the Force of Righteousness,

But often in the deepest darkness of experience illumination arises changing the whole aspect and environment, and this awful war has shown us more effectually than all the teachings of all the clergy, that the great Force of Might, which is being used now, is to exterminate that force, and finally establish for ever the great Spiritual Force, the Force of Righteousness.

And this recognition of the Force of Righteousness can only come from the proper knowledge of the Divine, which should be to us as the very breath of our nostrils, our whole existence.

There is a great future for us Jews, if we recognize this, for we already have so much to guide us and are so richly endowed with great literary treasures all ready for the taking.

Of course the spreading broadcast of pamphlets, booklets, etc., will not accomplish much if they fall on barren soil or are unwanted, but these conditions do not exist, for there is undoubtedly an awakening in our midst, which fills us with hope, there *is* a desire to understand and realize what an inestimable privilege it is to be born a Jew.

This Renaissance has arisen like the Phoenix from out the ashes of its dead self, and it rests with us as a Community whether it shall singe itself and perish in the dying embers or rise into the glory of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

We, of this Society knowing that there is an ever-increasing demand for the Teaching of Judaism as a Spiritual Force, and we dare not deny that demand, feel most strongly that we must act immediately and we must rely on the women of Israel not only for action, but to foster and spread with all their might the great ideals of our Faith. It is we who must now make it felt and understood that the greatest of all factors, the greatest of all powers is the possession of a Faith which is a living Reality.

This should be our privilege as women, and this is

one of the aims of the Society for which I have the honour to speak.

To the Society's Reading Room, children come in their thousands, they clamour for religious stories, for tales of the heroes of the Bible, and they love to hear about the symbols and the meaning of the Festivals, they listen as only Jewish children can, with the intensity of interest characteristic of a race full of intuition and imagination.

Here, then, is the field ready for the sowing of the seeds of the New Religion, which really is as old as the hills, and which is the only one that counts, the one which recently came to "Mr. Brittling," but which we as Israelites knew when we proclaimed to the world thousands of years ago: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is One." The one great Force, the one and only great Might.

We women must make others see that we can no longer afford to ignore the voices of those who cry out in the wilderness asking for guidance, we must answer the Call with the Truths of our belief, we must be able to comfort and also to bring understanding to those who have not as yet listened to the still small voice within.

Above all we must instil into the hearts of our children that if ever they become the possessors of Palestine, they must be worthy of that great national and historical realization.

Men and women also come to our Reading Room in large numbers asking us for books on religious subjects, pamphlets, anything which will enlighten them about the real meaning of the Jewish Faith, or tell them of the spiritual mission of the Jews.

We as British Jews should do all we can to make all Jews worthy of the country they live in. It is not enough to provide food, shelter and clothes, as we try to do, we should help everyone and all to attain a height of integrity which should not come from such an outlook as, let us say to take an example, " Honesty is the best policy," but for a perfect understanding of the ethical teachings of the Jewish Faith, which would make it impossible to be anything else but honest.

And to help to gain this higher perception the Community must be brought into closer relation with the religion of our fathers, which does not mean only the repetition of prayers and orthodox observance which, unless we have been properly taught to love, revere and to understand their spiritual meaning as well, we are apt to slacken from, and perhaps even to look upon as senseless and unnecessary and not applicable to the wants of these times. The religion we of this Society, desire to be the means of spreading is one of love for Judaism ; it is the religion of Mercy, of comfort and everlasting Peace.

These then, are some of the aims of the Society for the Distribution of Jewish Literature ; a little time ago, perhaps, they might have been considered somewhat idealistic, but now that everything has gone from us, our ideals must become part of our very life, and they must enter and permeate the new life on the threshold of which we stand.

The Society is but young and small as yet, but it has earnest workers ; in a year it has accomplished much ; it works only for the furtherance and glory of Judaism ; it

does not wish to proselytize, it wants only to strengthen, build up and restore a deep religious Faith, not only for the ignorant, but for all.

This in itself is not impossible ; as I have already told you the demand for literature of a religious nature for distribution already exists, therefore if you give your sympathy and encouragement, if you will work along these lines and regard the aims and objects of the Society as being those which all Jews should conceive to be the ideals of the race, we shall succeed in bringing spiritual help to many who now are Jews only in name.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have tried to set before you some of the objects of our Society, other speakers will follow me who will be able to tell you about its various activities.

Let me conclude by saying that I sincerely believe that the work we are doing is a good one and that it should be helped on its way, I firmly believe also that in helping it, you will be furthering the growth of Judaism, and I ask you what more can you desire ? What more beautiful or holy thing can you do ?